

VZCZCXRO4315
RR RUEHCN RUEHGH
DE RUEHGZ #0072/01 0370137
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 060137Z FEB 09
FM AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0173
INFO RUEHGZ/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE 0087
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0097
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0060
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 0043
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0043
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0043
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 0033
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC 0084
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC 0084

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GUANGZHOU 000072

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS
STATE FOR EAP/CM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS -- A GROWING FORCE IN GUANGDONG

1. (U) Summary: Volunteerism is gaining strength in South China, with the government-sponsored Guangdong Volunteer Federation (GVF) database of four million mostly young volunteers supposedly ready to heed the call when and where needed. Last year's three highly visible events -- the central China snowstorms, Sichuan earthquake and Beijing Olympics -- raised awareness of the need to mobilize volunteers quickly and in large numbers. Although the GVF dedicates most of its resources to staffing venues for government-sponsored events, it also directs volunteers to a growing range of social service activities, including year-long teaching stints in remote provinces. The Federation attributes the rise in volunteerism in part to increasing amounts of discretionary time and resources available to urban Chinese youth. The Federation's priority for 2009 is assisting unemployed migrant workers, although it is unclear how it will meet this need. End Summary.

National Events a Catalyst for Involvement

2. (SBU) A new attitude toward volunteerism is growing in south China, according to Xiang Xin, GVF Vice-President and Secretary-General. Three events in 2008 dramatically expanded the number of volunteers and brought a new sense of urgency and dedication to volunteer service. First, the snowstorm in central China during the 2008 Lunar New Year holiday stranded hundreds of thousands of migrant workers at Guangzhou's train stations, requiring a massive coordinated effort that included many volunteers to help manage the crowds and provide for basic needs. Second, the Sichuan earthquake in May 2008 dramatically raised the level of charitable concern across China, with the GVF coordinating the efforts of 10,000 volunteers in Guangdong, many of whom traveled to the earthquake site to assist government relief. Some have stayed on to help with longer term support. Finally, the Federation selected 100 volunteers out of thousands of applicants to staff venues during the Beijing Olympics in August.

Youth Oriented, Lots of Choices

3. (SBU) The GVF originated as a part of the Communist Youth League several decades ago, but did not become a distinct organization until 1987. Today, it retains its youth-oriented character with over four million registered volunteers, ninety percent of whom are students or young people. Xiang told us the greatest need for volunteers is in staffing government-sponsored events, such as the biannual Canton import-export trade fair, the world's largest. However, GVF also directs volunteers to an expanding range of other types of service, including assisting the elderly and disabled in their home, teaching in remote rural schools, and providing counseling services by phone. The Federation is already gearing up for the Asian Games which will be held in Guangzhou in November

¶2010. This will be the largest international event in Guangzhou's history and require an estimated 60,000 volunteers.

¶4. (SBU) In 2003, the GVF launched an entirely new program to place recent university graduates to teach for one or two years in poor communities in remote western provinces. Although salaries are extremely low, the competition for these 100 positions each year is relatively intense, according to Xiang, because training and experience through the GVF is highly valued. In 2009, the Federation's priority is assisting migrant workers left jobless by the economic slowdown. However, Xiang provided few details on how volunteers would actually assist migrants.

Getting the Message Out

¶5. (U) The GVF uses different media to sell its message of the benefits of volunteerism. Last year, they produced a television documentary after the Sichuan earthquake, focusing in part on cooperation between Guangdong volunteers and a Japanese relief team. They use public service advertisements in official publications, spots on radio and television, and even posters scattered around area university campuses.

¶6. (SBU) Xiang acknowledged that volunteering had also become "a trend or fashion", particularly among youth, but pointed out that it would ultimately have an important influence on their lives regardless of motivation. She also believes volunteerism is on the rise because people have more discretionary time and resources to volunteer than in the past. This is particularly true among students with free time during school breaks. In addition, some

GUANGZHOU 00000072 002 OF 002

younger volunteers want to build their resumes. Others come with a group of friends for a social experience. Xiang believes the new volunteerism at its heart reflects a growing concern for helping others or to cite an often-repeated phrase, she said, young people wanted to create a more "harmonious society."

GOLDBERG